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ABSTRACT

The multiracial population is one of the fastest growing segments of the U. S. population. In discussing the multiracial population it is first important to identify and define the groups that are under the heading of multiracial. The literature has included interracial couples, multiracial individuals, and families in which a cross-racial or transracial adoption or foster care arrangement has occurred. Definitions of these terms are provided. In working with the multiracial population, counselors are challenged to examine and address the deeply ingrained oppressive context by which society has viewed people of different ethnicities and cultures. Hence, advocacy with this population begins with honest exploration of the meaning society has attributed to the notion of race and the open examination of what the notion has come to mean to individual counselors. Professionals in the counseling, human services, and educational fields are called upon to be multiculturally competent. This competency requires professionals to function as advocates and social change agents as they carry out traditional roles and responsibilities of their jobs. Lists of periodicals dedicated to interracial issues, catalogs for multiracial materials, biracial identity materials, and relevant web sites are provided. (Contains 38 references.) (MKA)

Chapter Six

Multiracial families

By Kelley Kenney

The multiracial population is one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population. In discussing the multiracial population it is first important to identify and define the groups that are encompassed under the heading of multiracial. Literature on the topic of multiracialism has included interracial couples, multiracial individuals, and families in which a cross-racial or transracial adoption or foster care arrangement has occurred. The following definitions are provided for clarification of the groups that have been identified.

Definitions

Interracial couples — couples, married or not, involving partners who are each members of a different racial/cultural background.

Multiracial individuals — utilized synonymously with the term biracial, multiracial individuals are those persons whose parents are of two or more different racial/cultural backgrounds.

Cross racial/Transracial adoption — adoption of a child who is of a different racial heritage than the adopting parent or parents.

Cross racial/Transracial foster care arrangement — foster care arrangement for a child who is of a different racial heritage than the individual or individuals who are providing the foster care.

Multiracial families — multiracial families may include families that are composed of interracial couples and their multiracial offspring; single parents with biological offspring who are multiracial and single parents who have gone through a surrogate pregnancy process or artificial insemination process which results in the birth of a multiracial child; families in which a cross racial or transracial adoption or foster care arrangement has occurred, and gay or lesbian couples or single individuals who have adopted transracially, are providing transracial foster care, or have gone through a surrogate pregnancy process or artificial insemination process which results in the birth of a multiracial child.

Between 1960 and 1970, the rate of interracial marriages in the U.S. soared by more than 800 percent. U.S. census data reports that approximately one out of every twenty-five marriages is interracial. Nearly 3 million children in the country are of multiracial backgrounds. These figures do not include the large number of families who have become multiracial as a result of adoption or foster care arrangements. An increasing number of these families have become multiracial as a result of international adoptions.

The increasing multiracialization of our society has made for considerable controversy. Myths about mixed marriages, biracial people, and cross-racial adoption emerge from decades of politically and socially constructed racism. This racism not only impacts on our views of multiracial individuals and families, but also influences the level and quality of services available to them. Despite their increasing numbers, very little has been done to encourage an increase in the information and knowledge made available to human service professionals and educators who may be working with the multiracial population. Historically, discussions of ethnicity and culture have focused on persons who identify with one ethnic or cultural group. Hence, we have continued to scrutinize the lives of couples, individuals, and families who are identified as multiracial based upon myths, stereotypes, and other forms of information for which there is no empirical validity.

In working with the multiracial population, we are challenged to examine and address the deeply ingrained oppressive context by which we have viewed people of different ethnicities and cultures. Hence, advocacy with this population begins when we allow ourselves to explore honestly the meaning that our society has attributed to the notion of race, and examine openly what this notion has come to mean to us individually.

Professionals in the counseling, human services, and educational fields are called upon to be multiculturally competent. This competency requires us to function as advocates and social change agents as we carry out the traditional roles and responsibilities of our jobs.

Advocacy and social change for the multiracial population requires counseling, human service, and education professionals to take lead roles in enhancing the knowledge and awareness of persons with whom they work on the characteristics, issues, and concerns of the multiracial population. This is done by first exploring informational resources that may be available about this population. Available resources must be made accessible to

schools, churches, and community agencies and must also be made accessible to students of the counseling, human service, and education fields, who will find themselves working more consistently with this population as we move into the new millennium.

Having noticed the dearth of information on this population, people who are part of multiracial families, are multiracial themselves, or have an interest in the topic because of experiences they have had with this population, have begun to add to the professional literature on this topic. For example, Maria Root, a clinical psychologist and fellow of the American Psychological Association who identifies as multiracial, has published numerous professional articles and books regarding the experiences of multiracial individuals. In addition, Lise Funderburg wrote a book which was based both on her own experience as a multiracial individual and on the experiences of 65 other multiracial individuals. Walt Harrington and Mark and Gail Mathabane have written books concerning interracial couples that are based upon their own experiences as partners in interracial marriages. Another form of advocacy for this population involves encouraging and supporting a broader commitment to research and to sound empirical investigation on topics of relevance to the multiracial population, as a way of helping professionals better understand the lives, experiences, and challenges of members of this population. Advocacy also means taking the lead in the development and implementation of school curriculums and training programs that are inclusive of this population and the riches they have to offer.

Across the country, support groups and forums have been developed to provide support and affirmation to members of this population and their families. The existence of these groups have at times provided indications as to whether or not particular parts of the country are welcoming, supportive, or even safe for multiracial individuals and families. Taking this into account, another form of advocacy may involve the development and implementation of support networks in areas where the resources provided by a network would be beneficial to individuals and families. The worldwide web also has an array of resources and networks available for information and support of the multiracial population. Hence, professionals who are advocating for this population need to avail themselves of this information so that they can refer to it, as well as provide it to their constituents and clients as an additional resource option.

The identification of "multiracial" has come under considerable social, political, and economic scrutiny. The multiracial community has challenged the underlying power issues related to this scrutiny by starting a movement to force the federal government to consider the institution of a "multiracial category" on census forms for the year 2000. This movement has also been lobbying for all other government agencies and affiliates to include a multiracial category on forms and reportive documents. In 1997, the decision that was passed down from the U.S. Office of Budget and Management provided a compromise, which will allow individuals to select as many categories that apply to them as they wish.

Identity has been found to greatly impact human development and particularly, the development of self-esteem. If as counselors, human service providers, and educators, we are concerned about assisting in the positive identity development of our constituents, then it makes sense that we need to take a stand toward assisting individuals in achieving an identity that affirms who they are and allows them to feel good about themselves. For the multiracial population, this requires involvement on a political level. Hence, as advocates for this population we need to challenge the political forces within our communities that invalidate the role identifying oneself as multiracial has had upon the self-concepts of those with whom we work. In this regard, our work with school districts, social, civic, and government agencies becomes crucial.

Another very important aspect of advocacy involves going the extra mile for constituents and clients by intervening in ways that can have an impact on a broader, systemic level. For counselors and other human service professionals, this means that while continuing to maintain professionally ethical behavior and judgement, we take on less therapeutically oriented roles with clients. These roles may entail being more involved with our clients in personal, social, and political venues, particularly those that are geared toward increasing societal awareness, acceptance, and affirmation of multiracial individuals and families.

As the multiracial population continues to grow, it is clear that counseling professionals, human service providers, and educators will find themselves working with increading numbers of this population. As advocates we need to promote awareness and interest in the needs and strengths of the multiracial population and in doing so, insure that the services delivered to this population are done effectively, competently, and respectfully.

A relatively exhaustive list of references is included. In

addition, information from the Internet about support groups that are available across the country and a list of Internet websites offering support and addressing issues of relevance to the multiracial population are also included.

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Periodicals Dedicated to Interracial Issues

- AMEA Networking News. c/o Connie Hannah 833 Mt. Pleasant RD. Chesapeake, VA 23320.
- Interrace Magazine. PO Box 12048 Atlanta, GA 30355. 404-358-7877. A magazine for teens and adults involved in interracial relationships. Biracial Child is geared for kids 5-12 years old.

Interrace: The Source for Interracial Living. PO Box 15566 Beverly Hills, CA 90209.

Interracial Classified. PO Box 185 College Point, NY 11356-0185.

Interracial Club of Buffalo Newsletter. PO Box 400 Amherst Branch, Buffalo, NY 14226.

I-Pride: Interracial, Intercultural Pride. PO Box 191752, San Francisco, CA 94119-1752. Published by support group for multiracial people. Events and articles.

New People: The Journal for the Human Race. PO Box 47490 Oak Park, MI 48237.

Society for Interracial Families Newsletter. 23399 Evergreen, Suite 2222 Southfield, MI 48075.

Teaching Intolerance Magazine. Southern Poverty Law Center. 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104. FAX: 205-264-3121.

Catalogs of Books/Supplies with Multiracial/Ethnic/Cultural Themes

Arte Publico Press. Issues regular press releases of books with Hispanic themes. University of Houston. Houston, TX 77204-2090. 713-743-2999.

Council on Interracial Books for Children. Send SASE for a list of resources. 1841 Broadway, New York, NY 10023.

Great Owl Books. "A unique collection of children's books celebrating the many voices of our American culture. Ask about our special catalog for biracial children, adults and families!" Margot Sage-El, c/o Great Owl Books 41 Watchung Plaza, Suite 112 Montclair, NJ 07042. 1-800-299-3181. FAX: 1-201-783-5899.

Highsmith Multicultural Bookstore. Authentic Multicultural Books and Media. Highsmith, Inc. W5227 Highway 106 PO Box 800 FortAtkinson, WI 53538-0800. 1-800-558-2110.

InterSpectrum. A mail order catalog featuring merchandise for the interracial community.

Sandy & Son Educational Supplies. Write or call for free catalog of wooden puzzles of interracial families. 215 Hampshire Street Inman Square Cambridge, MA 02139. 617-491-6290.

Savanna Books. Send for complete catalog. 72 Chestnut Street
Cambridge, MA 02139. 617-876-7665.

Seal Press. 3131 Western Avenue, Suite 410 Seattle, WA
98121©1041. 206-283-7844. FAX: 206-285-9410. E-mail:
sealprss @ scn.org.

Tapestry Books. Publishers of the Adoption Book Catalog. PO Box
359 Ringoes, NJ 08551. 908-806-6695. FAX: 908-788-2999.

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- Interracial Haven: www.eden.com/~crusader/irhaven.html/
- Interracial/Biracial Resource List: www.lclark.edu/~absher/biracial.html/
- *My Shoes* support group for biracial/multiracial persons who have a white appearance: myshoes.com
- Bibliography Resources by and about Interracial and Multicultural People: www.personal.umich.edu/~kdown/multi.html

Books for Children

Africa Dream by Eloise Greenfield
Kids Explore America's Hispanic Heritage by Westridge Young Writers Workshop
Hopscotch Around the World by Mark Lankford
Free to be a Family by Marlo Thomas— cassette and book
Growing Up Adopted by Maxine Rosenberg
Being Adopted by Maxine Rosenberg
Families are Different by Nina Pellegrini
A Family for Jamie by Suzanne Bloom
Horace by Holly Keller
How it Feels to be Adopted by Jill Krementz
Katie-Bo: An Adoption Story by Iris L. Fisher
Lucy's Feet by Stephanie Stein
A Mother for Choco by Keiko Kasza
The Mulberry Bird by Ann Braff Brodzinsky
Real for Sure Sister by Ann Angel
Susan and Gordon Adopt a Baby by Judy Freudberg and Tony Geiss
Through Moon and Stars and Night Skies by Ann Turner
We Adopted You Benjamin Koo by Bobbie Jane Kates (Sesame St. book)

Why am I Different? by Norma Simon
On the Day You Were Born by Debra Frazier
Starry Night by David Spohn
Winter Wood by David Spohn
Living in Two Worlds by Maxine Rosenberg
One World One Child - photo book
People by Peter Spier
The People Atlas by Philip Steele
We're Different We're the Same by Bobbie Jane Kates (Sesame St. book)
Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman
All the Colors of the Race by Arnold Adoff
Cornrows by Camille Yarbrough
Honey I Love by Eloise Greenfield
Jambo Means Hello: Swahili Alphabet Book by Muriel and Tom Feelings
Moha Means One: Swahili Counting Book by Muriel and Tom Feelings
The People Could Fly-American Black Folktales by Virginia Hamilton
The Adventures of Connie and Diego by Maria Garcia
The Grandchildren of the Incas by Matti Pitkanen
Ten Little Rabbits by Virginia Grossman and Sylvia Long
Why There is No Arguing in Heaven by Deborah Nourse Lattimore
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